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Invertebrate Conservation News

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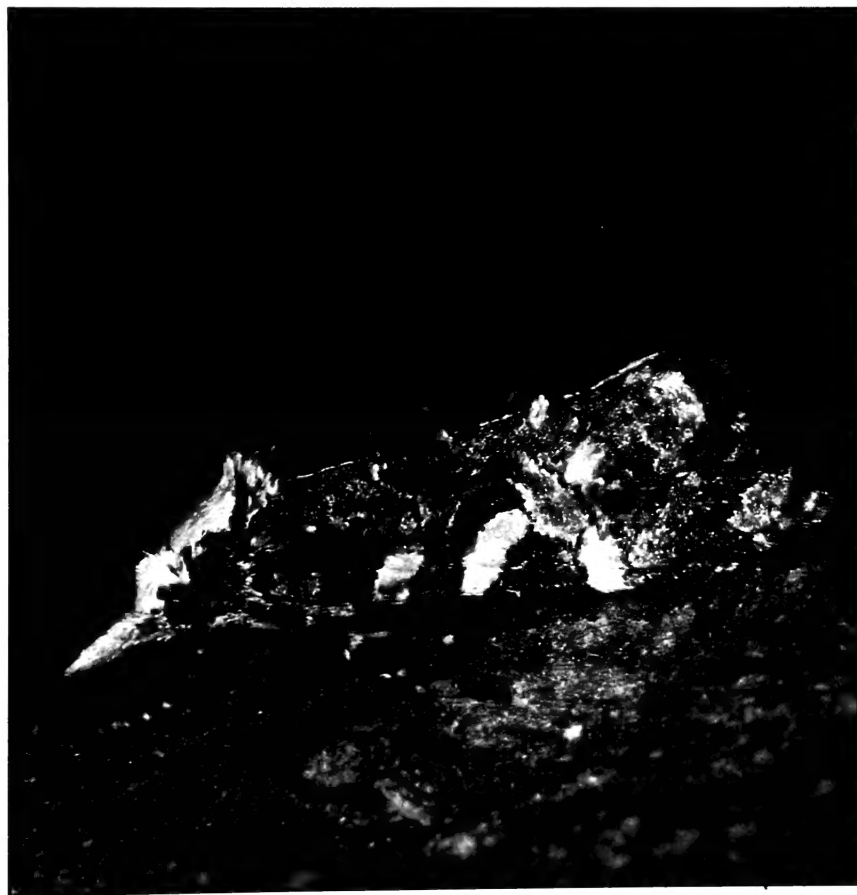
AUG 06 2012



Number 68

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY

June 2012



ISSN 1356 1359

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A publication of The Amateur Entomologists' Society



Founded 1935

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INVERTEBRATE CONSERVATION NEWS



No. 68, June 2012

EDITORIAL

There has recently been a remarkable and worrying spate of reports of alien invasive species in the UK. Introduced invertebrates have arguably been less of a problem in the UK than in certain other countries such as the USA, but there are some notable long-standing exceptions, including the American signal crayfish *Pacifastacus leniusculus*, which has helped to wipe out populations of the native White-clawed crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* mainly by spreading a pathogenic fungus that causes crayfish plague. Also, the Oak processionary moth *Thaumetopoea processionea* could indirectly harm the native fauna of native oak trees, *Quercus robur* and *Q. petraea*; not because it is likely to kill the trees but because pesticides are used to control it where its urticating hairs cause a problem for human health.

With regard to the recent discoveries, it is worrying that the so-called Asian longhorn beetle *Anoplophora glabripennis* has been breeding in England, as mentioned in an *ICN* article below. Its presence in other countries has led to the felling or death of vast numbers of trees of many species. In certain instances, especially if veteran trees were to be destroyed in this way, the habitats of endangered invertebrates in the UK could be seriously at risk.

Trees in the UK are at risk also from exotic disease-causing organisms, such as the fungus that wiped out most of our elm trees by causing Dutch elm disease. The recent introduction of the fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica* is of great concern, since it causes a lethal disease of the European Sweet chestnut *C. sativa*, an important provider of habitats for rare saproxylic invertebrates in the UK. There is also serious concern about another recently introduced fungus, *Chalara fraxinea*, which causes extensive dieback of shoots and twigs



of ash trees, *Fraxinus* spp. and can eventually kill entire trees. It has not thought to have become established in the UK but infected plants in a consignment from the Netherlands were recently intercepted by plant health inspectors.

The above three recent introductions have come not long after the discovery of the 'Killer shrimp' *Dikerogammarus villosus* in England and Wales in 2010. It initially seemed to be confined to three water bodies in South Wales and Cambridgeshire. The news of its presence in a river system far to the east of the original Cambridgeshire site is not entirely unexpected but it is nevertheless very unwelcome, given the reputation of this species to reduce the biodiversity of freshwater communities.

The AES recently responded to a European consultation about legislation on invasive species. The multiple-choice answers mainly concerned the importation and possession of exotic species that might escape from captivity. In certain circumstances, such escapes could pose a significant risk but a far greater risk is evidently posed by accidental importation. This happens when invasive species 'hitch a lift' with goods such as living plants and with wooden packing materials. The risk can to some extent be reduced by inspection (and in some instances fumigation) of cargoes but it will remain high unless more stringent measures can be introduced. Opinions have, for example, been expressed that trees larger than seedlings should not be imported into the UK but such a restriction would contravene the current international agreements on the free movement of goods.

There might be little hope of securing more stringent controls over trade that carries a high risk of introducing alien invasive species accidentally but it is sometimes possible to eradicate such species before they can spread beyond the sites of initial introduction. Where notifiable plant diseases or pests are concerned, UK laws require the owners of infected or potentially affected plants to destroy them. It remains to be seen whether there is a political will to strengthen measures against the accidental spread of invasive species through international trade. We can at least hope that politicians and their advisers will not be tempted to opt for an easy target by imposing inappropriate restrictions on a hobby that is pleasurable and fascinating for many adults and children and that helps to enthuse new generations of invertebrate conservationists.





NEWS, VIEWS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Review of the list of species protected in Great Britain

The timetable for the sixth quinquennial review of Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has recently been announced. There will be four stages, as follows:

- June 2012: an advance notice period
- July 2012 to March 2013: the main consultation stage involving all stakeholders, including the conservation agencies. Stakeholders will be sent the guidance notes, information on the process, criteria and deadlines, and invited to take part in the review. During this period, the statutory agencies will compile a statutory list, while working with all stakeholders to select species and to provide any clarification required, either on the process or on suggestions relating to species.
- April to November 2013: a further consultation stage in which outstanding issues are highlighted and discussed with organisations who raised them. The statutory agencies will assess the scientific underpinning of the proposals they have received. Proposers of species for which queries have not been resolved can be consulted further if necessary. This stage will culminate with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee recommending to Defra, and the Welsh and Scottish Governments a statutory list of species to be added to, or removed from the Schedule. Each proposal will be accompanied by a statement about its effect, especially in relation to commercial interests.
- A final consultation by Defra and the Scottish and Welsh Governments. Stakeholders will be consulted on the final list before it is signed into law.

There should be plenty of scope for suggesting amendments to Schedule 5, which can include alterations in the details of protection for species already on the Schedule, as well as the addition or deletion of species. The AES Conservation Committee will be involved in drawing up a series of suggested amendments under the auspices of Invertebrate Link. Readers with suggestions are invited to contact the AES Conservation Secretary: icn-submission@amentsoc.org

Final version of National Planning Policy Framework in the UK

The UK government's National Planning Policy Framework directs local planning authorities to permit development that is deemed to be



sustainable. Despite defining certain kinds of unsustainable development, the Framework seems to facilitate developments that could be called sustainable while being very harmful. With regard to wildlife, the Framework purports to provide safeguards by enabling the protection of designated areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. This reliance on site designation is, however, apparently inconsistent with government policies on biodiversity (e.g. the England Biodiversity Strategy – Sections 2.5-2.6), which recognise the importance of habitats throughout the wider landscape. The AES Council is of course pleased to see such policies, 43 years after a former President of the society, the late Roy Hilliard, proposed such an approach in his foreword to the first issue of the newsletter that is now *ICN*.

In order to apply the principle of sustainable development, local planning authorities are expected to formulate “local plans”, which should form a basis for deciding whether to approve proposed site developments. In theory, a local plan should take account of biodiversity and could identify sites of local conservation value. In practice, however, many of the UK’s local authorities have not developed adequate local plans and are unlikely to have the resources to do so. In such cases, they will be compelled to grant planning consent by default except where the site concerned is formally designated for protection. Anything of lesser rank than a Site of Special Scientific Interest seems unlikely to be spared from development. Areas of ‘Local Green Space’ can be designated but the potential for such protection is undermined by a lack of biological data.

The draft version of the Framework did not provide much scope for protecting brownfield habitats but it was criticised for not explicitly maintaining the existing presumption in favour of developing brownfield land in preference to greenfield land. The final version reinstates this presumption but it includes a caveat with regard to brownfield sites of high environmental value.

For reasons of space, this issue of *ICN* does not include the specific comments that were submitted by the AES Council in the consultation. We hope, however, to post a summary of these comments on the AES website, with a series of notes as to whether they seem to have had any effect on the final version of the Framework.

Spread of the “killer shrimp” in the UK

Until recently, the spread of the Killer shrimp *Dikerogammarus villosus* in the UK seemed to have been confined to the three sites where it was first detected in 2010. As mentioned in *ICN* No. 64, these were in



Cardiff Bay and Eglwys Nynydd reservoir in South Wales and at Grafham Water in Cambridgeshire. Although the spread of the shrimp has probably been curtailed by a well-publicised biosecurity campaign ("*Stop the Spread B Check, Clean and Dry*"), there was probably little reason to hope that it would never spread beyond the three initially discovered sites in the UK. Fears were regrettably confirmed in March 2012, when the Environment Agency announced that the shrimp had been discovered at Barton Broad, a nature reserve in East Anglia, owned by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo desmouliniana* (UK RDB3) occurs there. The invasive shrimp was discovered by consultants working for Natural England in a monitoring programme.

Since Barton Broad forms part of an extensive river system, the shrimp is now probably largely unrestricted in its movements over a considerable area. Following the initial discovery at Barton Broad, it was found a short distance upstream in the River Ant and downstream all the way to a point slightly beyond the confluence of the Ant with the river Bure. Monitoring is being focussed on areas that contain beds of the Zebra mussel *Dreissena polymorpha* (another alien invasive species), since these are a preferred niche for colonisation by the shrimp.

The Environment Agency, Natural England and the Countryside Council for Wales have jointly identified 291 priority sites to be monitored specifically for the presence of the shrimp. Also, there are many more locations across England and Wales where the possible presence of the shrimp is checked in the course of routine invertebrate monitoring.

Sweet chestnut blight found in UK

The European Sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* has been naturalised in Great Britain for many centuries, sometimes reaching a great age and providing habitats for rare saproxylic invertebrates. In parts of continental Europe, many Sweet chestnuts have succumbed to chestnut blight, a lethal disease caused by the fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica*. In the USA, an estimated three billion American Sweet chestnuts *Castanea dentata* were wiped out by the disease, so that the species now exists mainly in the form of clusters of small stems that grow from surviving root systems and soon die from the disease. The fungus is believed to have originated in Asia, where it causes only minor disease on Asiatic species of *Castanea*, with which it has presumably co-evolved.



In the UK, chestnut blight has long been excluded through quarantine control but it has recently been discovered at two sites; one in Warwickshire, central England and the other in East Sussex, south-east England, where the site owners were trying to establish nut orchards, using trees imported from France. The owners were served with notices, requiring them to uproot and destroy all their Sweet chestnut plants. A survey of all other Sweet chestnuts around each site has not revealed any signs of the disease but there is still some cause for concern that the fungus might be persisting inconspicuously, either surviving on dead bark or causing slight infections on other tree species.

The importation of Sweet chestnut into the UK is subject to special checks under a 'plant passport' system but this safeguard has obviously failed to work in this instance. If the fungus becomes established in the UK, there might be some prospect of controlling it using a technique that involves inoculating infected trees with a form of the fungus that carries a virus-like agent that renders it hypovirulent and that can be transmitted to the fungus that is already in the tree, thus allowing the tree to recover.

Ash disease in plants imported into the UK

For several years a new and often lethal disease of common ash *Fraxinus excelsior* has been occurring in an increasing number of countries in central and northern Europe. It is caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus*, (asexual form, *Chalara fraxinea*), which has been newly described but is morphologically identical to a harmless species *H. albidus* that has long been known to occur on the stalks and veins of fallen leaves. In 2010, the new aggressive variant had moved westwards as far as the countries facing the UK across the North Sea but a recent volunteer-aided survey conducted in Scotland by a Danish forest pathologist, Dr. Iben M. Thomsen, did not show any signs of the fungus. Then, soon after Dr. Thomsen released her reassuring news, inspectors found infected plants in a consignment on its way from a Dutch supplier to a customer in southern England.

The paperwork showed that 90 customers had ordered a total of about 2000 ash plants from the Dutch company that sent the infected consignment. At the time of writing they were all being served with notices to destroy their plants and it is hoped that this action will prevent the fungus from becoming established in the UK. If the control measures fail or if the fungus reaches the UK by other means, the consequences could be very serious, with regard not only to the



potential loss of ash trees as a feature of our landscapes but also to the loss of their associated invertebrate habitats. A number of British invertebrates, including the micro-moths *Zelleria hepariella*, *Prays fraxinella*, *Pammene suspectana* and *Euzophera pinguis* are specific to ash. Information about the disease can be found at: www.forestry.gov.uk/ashdieback. Any suspected cases in Great Britain should be reported to the Forestry Commission Plant Health Service (tel. 0131 314 6414; e-mail plant.health@forestry.gsi.gov.uk) or the Fera Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate (tel. 01904 465625; e-mail planthealth.info@fera.gov.uk).

Asian Longhorn beetle: bad news in the UK

The so-called Asian longhorn beetle *Anoplophora glabripennis* ('ALB') has been mentioned several times in *ICN* over recent years. In several countries around the world, it is an alien invasive species, which has been carried mainly in wood products used as packaging for East Asian exports. It is feared for the severe harm that its larvae can inflict on a wide range of tree species, by burrowing in stems and branches and thus causing branch breakage or the disruption of water conduction. The authorities in the affected countries generally fell affected trees in order to reduce risks of harm from falling branches and to reduce the rate of spread of the beetle. In certain countries, such as the USA and Italy, many tens of thousands of affected trees have been felled for these reasons. The cost to the USA is estimated to have been about \$7 million so far. In China, where the beetle is native, it is said to have killed millions of poplars, which were planted for the control of soil erosion.

Either through the death or the removal of trees, the international spread of the beetle is a threat to invertebrates that depend on trees for their habitats. There is particular cause for concern where habitats are scarce or already under threat, as in the case of veteran trees. Analysis of climate data indicates that the beetle could become established in most of England and Wales and some warmer coastal areas of Scotland. South-east England and the south coast are thought to be at the greatest risk.

In March this year, the Food & Environment Research Agency (Fera) reported the discovery of a breeding population of *A. glabripennis* near Paddock Wood in Kent. Twenty-two trees showing signs of colonisation were found in an area of about seven hectares (17 acres). The site had been monitored since 2009, following the discovery of an adult specimen. This had probably emerged from wood packaging at



an adjacent industrial site, where imported stone from China had been delivered. Emergent beetles have been found several times in the UK since the 1990s but have apparently failed to establish any breeding colonies until now.

By the time of writing, a total of 65 trees had been found either to be affected or to be at high risk. Also the zone of the outbreak had been extended by about 100 metres. All the affected or high-risk trees were due to be burnt by mid-June. Since burning is the only practicable means of destroying the concealed larvae and pupae, the long-term habitat value of the trees concerned is completely lost. Surveys will continue, with the intention of destroying all affected trees and other trees of the most susceptible species in the outbreak area, however extensive this proves to be. The UK authorities have the power to undertake these measures, as conferred by plant health legislation.

Fera and the Forestry Commission hope to eradicate the outbreak before it has the chance to spread further afield. This will require sustained vigilance, since the development from egg to emergent adult takes two years; perhaps longer in the relatively cool climate of the UK. Soon after the discovery in Kent, an adult specimen of the beetle was reportedly found by a householder in the Weybridge area of Surrey, about 90 km to the west of Paddock Wood. The latter discovery does not, however, necessarily indicate that there are any other breeding populations in the UK.

Since the larvae of the beetle are larger than those of many native wood-boring insects in the UK, the large size of their exit holes (circular in cross-section and approximately 10mm in diameter) is a clue to the possible presence of a breeding colony. There are, however, a few native wood-boring insects that also produce large holes in living stems or branches and that might therefore engender false alarms and perhaps the unnecessary destruction of trees in which they occur. They include the Goat moth *Cossus cossus*, which is generally rare in the UK. Its larval burrows are, however, oval in cross-section and can reach up to 16mm in width. The Goat moth sometimes becomes a pest of planted trees but it can be regarded as a species of conservation concern in the UK, together with various other invertebrates that are associated with its boreholes. False alarms could be triggered also by the discovery of other signs indicative of *A. glabripennis* but that also occur with various native wood-boring insects. These include piles of sawdust-like droppings at the bases of infested trees or scrape-marks on bark or weeping sap at sites where eggs have been laid.



Anyone who finds a beetle answering to the description of *A. glabripennis* or the very similar-looking *A. chinensis* (Citrus longhorn beetle) in the UK should, if possible, securely capture the specimen(s) and contact the Fera Plant Health Helpline on 0844 248 0071 or by e-mail at planthealth.info@fera.gsi.gov.uk. The adults of these species are mostly 20-40mm long and are shiny black with variable white markings. Their antennae are particularly distinctive, being up to twice the body length, and are black with white or light blue bands. Fera should likewise be contacted if the presence of a breeding colony is suspected by the presence of large exit holes on the stem or branches of any broadleaved tree, unless definitely known to have been caused by a native wood-boring species such as the Goat moth. More detailed information about *A. glabripennis* can be found on the Forestry Commission website at www.forestry.gov.uk/asianlonghornbeetle.

European consultation on invasive species

The AES Council recently responded to a consultation over European legislation on alien invasive species. We expressed support for regulations designed to help prevent the establishment of alien species that have demonstrable potential to become invasive, while equally supporting the right of individuals to acquire and keep, in captivity, species that do not have such characteristics. We also pointed out that a far greater risk arises from the poorly controlled and accidental importation of invasive species that are carried in or on imported trees, soil or wooden packaging materials. We now know, however, that, of 881 respondents, 653 said "yes" to more effective regulation of trade and use of exotic species as pets (see http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/invasivealien/docs/results_consult.pdf). Information about a campaign against inappropriate restrictions can be found at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Small-Life-Supplies/119920648082060>



SITES AND SPECIES OF INTEREST

Oil beetle rediscovered in Lincolnshire after 28 years

A recent issue of Buglife News (Thursday 3rd May) included an announcement that, for the first time in at least 28 years, a confirmed record of the Black oil beetle *Meloë proscarabaeus* has been made in the eastern English county of Lincolnshire. Buglife received notification of the



sighting, made near Grantham, as part of its National oil beetle hunt. The previous record of this species in the county dates back to 1984. The only other species of oil beetle known from Lincolnshire is the Violet oil beetle *Meloë violaceus*, which has not been recorded there since 1900.

Buglife reports that all of the four British remaining species of oil beetle (of a formerly recorded total of eight) are in decline, as shown by its 2011 survey and by historic data, collated by the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. Factors in this trend are thought to include the loss of wildflower-rich habitats and the decline in wild bee populations, with which oil beetles are associated. The new Lincolnshire record appears to be a significant discovery, since the declines have been greatest in the east of England. Information on the survey can be found at: <http://www.buglife.org.uk/getinvolved/surveys/Oil+Beetle+Hunt/>

Invertebrates of coarse woody debris in streams

In the English Midlands, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been undertaking a study of the bee-mimicking hoverfly *Chalcosyrphus eunotus* (UK RDB, Nationally Scarce), nicknamed the Logjammer Hoverfly, owing to its habit of perching on log jams and woody debris in stream channels. It breeds in such debris and has probably suffered habitat loss because of excessive tidying-up in many parts of Britain. Using a mark-release-recapture method, Andy Jukes (Jukes, 2011) found evidence that the populations of the flies on two woodland streams in the Cannock Chase area of the county, the Sherbrook and the Old Brook, form part of a metapopulation, which probably extends across a number of streams.

The hoverfly seems to have benefited from a project in which the county Trust has been managing coarse woody debris in rivers. Also a population of the White-clawed crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* has shown an increased number of juveniles. There is a similar project in the River Bure in the East Anglian county of Norfolk, involving the National Trust.

The project has been allowed under the Water Framework Directive because the River Bure is slow-flowing and is therefore unlikely to wash the debris down to bridges or to urban areas where obstruction of channels and flooding would be a problem.

Reference

Jukes, A. (2011). *Chalcosyrphus eunotus*. Year 2 - Investigation into species= mobility and metapopulations. A report for Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, 19 pp.



Short-haired bumblebee re-introduced to UK

Bumblebees have been in the news in the UK lately, with a project by Buglife to create corridors of flower-rich meadows, a campaign by Friends of the Earth and the launch of the "Bee Kind" project by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust in order to promote the cultivation of bee-friendly plants in parks and gardens. In addition to those initiatives, there is a reintroduction project for the Short-haired bumblebee *Bombus subterraneus*, of which the last UK record was made at Dungeness in Kent in 1988. It was officially declared extinct in 2000.

The project, led by Dr. Nikki Gammans of the Bumblebee Conservation Project, involved careful planning and negotiation, involving Natural England as the statutory authority, in order to find a suitable overseas source that would not be harmed by the removal of queens and that would be safe with respect to bee diseases and parasites. Originally, the plan was to use queens from New Zealand, where the species had been artificially established by European settlers in the 19th century. There were, however, problems caused by the habituation of the bees to the seasons of the Southern Hemisphere and by inbreeding. A colony from southern Sweden was therefore selected with the approval of the Swedish Board of Agriculture (Jordbruksverket). Following a period of quarantine, the first release took place in May of this year at the RSPB Dungeness reserve in May 2012.

Olympic sites: more conflict with conservation

As mentioned in earlier issues of *ICN*, extensive 'brownfield' habitats have been destroyed by the development of the Olympic Park in the lower Lea Valley in east London, which is portrayed by those in power as having been an area of complete industrial dereliction but now improved by the creation of new habitats. There are also concerns about the use of other sites for Olympic events, including the Cycling Road Race, which is routed over Box Hill, on the North Downs, south of London. There is a population of the micro-moth *Phyllonorycter scabiosella* (UK RDB3), the larvae of which mine the radical leaves of Small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*. The moth is allegedly threatened by the creation of spectator areas on Box Hill but the organisers say they will protect the area with fences and barriers.





LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The following letter by Dr. Keith Alexander refers to an article about organic farming, which appeared in *ICN* in October 2010. The letter was received in February 2011 but, owing to a filing error, it was not promptly published. The editor is very sorry about the accidental delay. Since many months have elapsed since the article appeared, it now seems worth recalling the gist of it, in order to put Dr. Alexander's letter into context.

The article referred to a research project on the biodiversity of organic farms, led by Prof. Tim Benton at Leeds University and funded by the Rural Economy Land Use programme. A range of organic farms were found to have only 12.4% more biodiversity than their conventional counterparts. The authors argued that this benefit was small in relation to the relatively low agricultural yield, this being only 55% of that obtained on the conventional farms. They also argued that other studies had exaggerated such benefits by failing to take account of the relatively high landscape diversity of areas where organic farms are concentrated.

Reference

http://www.fbs.leeds.ac.uk/research/bulletin/index_2010.php?id=1094

Organic farming: why is big business so worried?

from Dr. Keith Alexander, Exeter

ICN's Research Notes (October 2010) included an item under the heading of Organic farming: of limited benefit to wildlife? But the report it was based on was deeply flawed. The specific research project found that organic farms provide a benefit of 12.4% in comparison to conventional farming. This was clearly an objective finding but the question is whether it represents a 'limited' benefit or significant benefit. The conclusion that the benefit is 'limited' involves subjective interpretation. The original statement on the web included a 'caveats section' that was far longer than the press release! The section entitled "New footnotes and clarifications", added on 18th May 2010, actually needs interpretation itself. It tries very hard not to say anything conclusive but, under the "just over 12%" quote, it says: "Our data show that organic farming on average provides an increase in biodiversity... Some attempts have been made to synthesise [the published] literature... which suggest that the 'average' effect size is 30-40%." So this single study found 12.4% but the average across many studies is 30-40%. Basically the headline was just spin. The truth is that organic farming on average generates a significant benefit to biodiversity.



The item then went on to imply that, because the biodiversity benefit was lower than the gain in agricultural yield from conventional farming (55%), somehow this meant that yield gain was more important than biodiversity gain, as if the two effects correlate in some way! What nonsense.

Of course the report did not go into long-term sustainability, and the resource-hungry conventional farming with its reliance on NPK fertiliser, pesticides, de-worming drugs, etc., etc. I haven't read the original paper but did it consider the cost of long-term damage to the land? – through run-off, damage to water tables, soil erosion etc., etc. – i.e. the hidden costs which rarely feature because the effects happen off-site.

The report name-drops 'popular' insect groups – butterflies, bees and hoverflies – but these are largely mobile species on the type of farmland studied. The research clearly weighted numbers of individual songbirds rather than presence of viable populations, as it comments that organic farms held magpies and jays, which reduced the numbers of small birds. Predation is part of 'ecosystem function' isn't it? Magpies and jays are biodiversity too aren't they? The key question is whether or not predation is causing extinction of prey items, which it clearly isn't. So this topic is irrelevant to biodiversity benefit surely?

This whole press release is clearly heavily biased. The authors were clearly hoping to find that organic farming did not increase biodiversity, but they failed, and so they present their positive results in a negative way. This approach is symptomatic of how big business tackles the competition from organic farming. They are running scared and having to use spin rather than facts. A classic case was the press release from Britain's Food Standards Agency which announced recently that there was no nutritional benefit from organic foods compared with non-organic foods, but strangely the equivalent agency in France found the opposite to be true. It is always important to read between the lines of any statement coming from big business and especially the organisations which support it covertly. Ray Softly – in the same issue of *ICN* – was right to raise the issue of the earth's carrying capacity – big business only sees the growing population as an opportunity to increase profits by further trashing the planet. If any reader is seriously interested in these issues then I can recommend Graham Harvey's book *The Carbon Fields. How our countryside can save Britain*. (Grass Roots, 2008).

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL.....	1
NEWS, VIEWS AND GENERAL INFORMATION	
Review of the list of species protected in Great Britain	3
Final version of National Planning Policy Framework in the UK .	3
Spread of the “killer shrimp” in the UK.....	4
Sweet chestnut blight found in UK.....	5
Ash disease in plants imported into the UK.....	6
Asian Longhorn beetle: bad news in the UK	7
European consultation on invasive species.....	9
SITES AND SPECIES OF INTEREST	
Oil beetle rediscovered in Lincolnshire after 28 years.....	9
Invertebrates of coarse woody debris in streams.....	10
Short-haired bumblebee re-introduced to UK.....	11
Olympic sites: more conflict with conservation	11
LETTER TO THE EDITOR	
Organic farming: why is big business so worried?	12

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Published by the Amateur Entomologists' Society
(Registered Charity No. 267430), from PO Box 8774, London SW7 5ZG.
Printed by Cravitz Printing Co. Ltd., 1 Tower Hill, Brentwood, Essex CM14 4TA.